

Cal/EPA CalEnviroScreen Tool Workshop Summary
Hosted by the Southern California Association of Governments

December 12, 2012

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) hosted a Workshop to discuss the California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen) currently being developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) of the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA). The purpose of this tool is to screen the environmental health of California's communities using existing environmental, health and socio-economic data to compare the cumulative impacts of environmental pollution on the state's communities.

Arsenio Mataka, Assistant Director at Cal/EPA and George Alexeeff, Director at OEHHA provided a PowerPoint presentation on the CalEnviroScreen tool. In their presentation, Mr. Mataka and Mr. Alexeeff explained that the tool identifies a number of indicators of exposure, public health effects, environmental effects, and socioeconomic characteristics and presents a broad picture of the relative burdens communities face from environmental pollution. Using ZIP codes as the base geographical unit, the draft CalEnviroScreen tool assigns cumulative impact scores to 1800 ZIP codes throughout the state based on various indicators and factors. The tool has been peer reviewed, including by scientists and members of academia.

In addition to being applied towards ongoing internal decision-making at Cal/EPA, the CalEnviroScreen could be a possible tool to meet the requirements of recently passed Senate Bill 535 (De Leon, 2012). SB 535 requires that Cal/EPA identify disadvantaged communities for investment opportunities based on geographic, socioeconomic, public health, and environmental hazard criteria. SB 535 also requires that the Department of Finance's investment plan for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund must allocate 25% to projects that benefit these identified communities and 10% to projects located within these communities.

Following the PowerPoint presentation, Cal/EPA staff opened the workshop for questions and discussion. Areas of discussion included methodology, impacts on economic development and property values, and application to policies and programs outside of Cal/EPA.

Methodology

Several attendees pointed out that some of the communities they represented had factors currently not in the draft CalEnviroScreen tool. Among the factors suggested were a community's proximity to freeways, hazardous waste sites, and diesel usage. Cal/EPA staff responded that they will consider these additional factors in an update version of the tool.

Questions were asked about the scoring system and how these were applied to communities. In addition, the use of ZIP code instead of census tracts as the measured geographical unit was

recommended. Participants noted that zip codes are “too generalized.” Cal/EPA staff responded that they may consider using tiers rather than scores and they are still reviewing comments and data to see if they can revise the geographical unit currently used.

CalEnviroScreen Tool Data Update

A question was raised on how the data will be updated over time. Cal/EPA staff responded that they expect that data will be updated on a regular basis.

Impacts on Economic Development and Property Values

Several attendees commented that with the elimination of redevelopment funds, businesses might be averse to investing in communities with worse performance as identified by CalEnviroScreen. Another question asked whether this tool would affect property values. Cal/EPA staff responded that this tool will help identify opportunities for clean investment throughout the state and staff would review results of insurance and property values as they are released.

Application to Policies and Programs outside of Cal/EPA

During the discussion, a few questions were asked about the CalEnviroScreen’s relationship with CEQA and legal liability. Cal/EPA staff responded that the definition of cumulative impacts is different between CEQA and the CalEnviroScreen. They added that there is a need to demystify the environmental objectives in the CEQA process.

Some comments were concerned with the tool’s consideration of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions since only two of the twenty indicators are related to GHG emissions. Furthermore, several attendees asked for clarification on the role of SB 535 and whether the tool will vary the formula for SB 535 allocations. Cal/EPA staff responded most indicators could be used as a nexus to SB 535-related investment and that staff would update data for the next draft and on a regular basis, and will look for better indicators with collective data from state and local agencies. While the tool can help identify impacted communities, it is ultimately the California Department of Finance (DOF) that provides input on the investment plan program.

Next Steps

The Cumulative Impact Precautionary Approach (CIPA) workgroup will hold a public meeting where the draft CalEnviroScreen maps will be first presented, which is tentatively scheduled as in January 2013. Cal/EPA will also release a memo on the use of the tool at the January meeting. The meeting will be followed by a public comment period through January 2013. Cal/EPA staff will also be available to meet with SCAG to discuss and review tool specifics, such as data and indicator weighting. SCAG staff indicated that another meeting will be held to receive comments on the draft tool.